

## MYSTIFIED MR. LAYTON

By W. Crawford Sherlock

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With an impatient gesture Mr. Samuel Layton laid down his evening paper. "Hang it all, Fred and his wife are going away again! This is the third annual disappearance they have made, leaving town in the spring and not returning until fall. Where in creation do they go? Fred must make money somehow; he never asks me for a cent and lives like a nabob during the winter. It's too much for me."

Mr. Layton frowned heavily as he concluded his soliloquy. His keen mind and indomitable will had enabled him to solve the difficult problems of life and had raised him from the plane of poverty to that of great wealth. Notwithstanding his shrewdness, however, he had not been able to fathom the secret of his son's ways and means.

Fred Layton had finished his college course and gained renown on the grid-iron and in other athletic sports, but he had failed utterly in his studies and had announced his intention of marrying Miss Edna Morris, a pretty girl but decidedly poor.

But Mr. Layton had planned that his son should wed the daughter of his partner, Miss Mattie Walton, and thus succeed to great wealth and the entire control of an established business. This difference of opinion between father and son led to a stormy inter-leave, during which Mr. Layton declared that if Fred married Miss Morris the parental purse would be closed against him forever. With a shrug of his broad shoulders, the young man had intimated that he could take care of himself and did not propose to ask his father for financial aid.

A month later the young people were quietly married. They established themselves in a cozy little flat in a fashionable neighborhood. They lived well, dressed well, entertained their friends and to all appearances were prosperous.

Mr. Layton naturally thought this condition of affairs could not last, and he smiled grimly as he thought of the conditions he would make when his son came to him for aid. As the months passed by without such an appeal the old gentleman grew more and more mystified.

He made many inquiries as to his son's source of revenue, but only discovered that when Fred and his wife

returned from their summer outing they brought back a snug sum in cash with them. Mr. Layton scanned the papers diligently to find out where they went, he inquired at the postoffice for their summer address and even telephoned to the owner of the flat, but no knowledge could be gained. Mr. and Mrs. Fred Layton disappeared as completely for a time as if the earth had swallowed them.

The father grew restless and nervous, his digestion became impaired and he went from place to place upon the plea of regaining his health, but in reality in the hope of solving the mystery about his son. All in vain.

"I can't stand this any longer, doctor," declared Mr. Layton one day when his physician called. "I must find out where Fred goes and what he does. I suppose it is mere curiosity, but I must fathom the boy's secret. I've been used to solving problems and can't endure failure."

"I'm sorry I can't help you, Mr. Layton," replied Dr. Brooks, "but if you don't stop this roving about from place to place, eating all sorts of food, you'll be dead in another year. Go up to the Mont Alta House, in the Alleghenies and stay a month. I was there last year, and the table was excellent and the air and water are life giving."

"The Mont Alta," repeated Mr. Layton. "I've heard of the place, but it didn't amount to much a few years ago."

"It's under a new management now," returned the doctor, "and is a strictly first class house."

The Mont Alta House was even more than Dr. Brooks had said. The table was so excellent and agreed with Mr. Layton so well that he became robust again. Upon one thing he resolved, and that was to secure the chef of the house if that person could be had for money. Accordingly he sent for the chef.

"I would like to," Mr. Layton stopped suddenly and turned toward the chef, then the light of recognition came into his eyes. "So this is the way you make your living, you young rascal. Aren't you ashamed to disgrace me by doing such work?"

"Not a bit," returned Fred Layton coolly, taking an easy chair and surveying his father with an amused smile. "It was the only thing I could do that paid promptly. My wife and I leased the place, and she looks after the upstairs, while I boss the kitchen. We've done pretty well and expect to buy the place this year. I have an option on it."

"Suppose your fashionable friends had seen you in your present costume. What then?" sneered the old gentleman.

"Well, they didn't, father," Fred replied, "so there's no use guessing what I would have done. I changed my

name to Lataine, however, to save your pride if I were discovered."

"Well, I'm glad you had enough sense to do that," Mr. Layton's tone was more pleasant. "How in the world did you learn to cook? You do it well, I must say."

"At home, sir." The son laughed at his father's odd expression. "You remember when I broke my leg? Well, it was pretty tiresome being caged up in the house alone, so I struck up a friendship with Antoine, your French chef. The old fellow took a fancy to me and initiated me into his art. It was only a diversion to me then, but it came in handy when I started in this business."

"Fred, send for your wife," said Mr. Layton abruptly.

When Mrs. Fred appeared the old gentleman continued: "You're a pretty pair of independents, aren't you? I like your spirit and want you to stop this business and live with me. Will you do it?"

"Just as soon as the season closes we will, father," they replied, "and until then you shall stay with us."

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